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A book to shake your taint in superpower arms buildup

mark's book mark

By MARK HATFIELD

"At 11 a.m. on June 3, 1980, the Air Force officers monitoring the early warning system deep inside Cheyenne Mountain, Colorado, were struck with terror. The fluorescent display screens connected to the Nova Data General computer were flashing a warning: The Soviet Union had launched a large attack from its land-based missiles and strategic submarines. The submarines had launched their missiles from positions close to the coast of the United States; the missiles would reach their targets in less than 10 minutes... Pilots and crews of 116 B-52 nuclear bombers at airfields across the United States raced to their planes, gunned the engines and began to taxi for takeoff. Nuclear submarine commanders at sea were alerted for action. At the underground launch centers near silos housing the American intercontinental ballistic missiles, officers strapped themselves into jolt-resistant swivel chairs, unlocked strongboxes, removed verification codes, and inserted launch keys into their slots... Fortunately for our planet this computer error was discovered in time. But it was only one of three serious computer failures in eight months which placed the United States on nuclear alert. Incredibly, the June 3 incident was followed by another alarm on June 6, reported by the same faulty commuter."

The quotation comes from *Russian Roulette: The Superpower Game*, by the highly respected Arthur Macy Cox (Times Books, \$14.95). This vital book has an unusual twist in that Cox, a former senior analyst for the CIA and a Brookings Institute Fellow, invited Georgy Arbatov, director of the Institute of US and Canadian Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and a member of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, to make comment and rebuttal. I have known Arbatov since the Dartmouth Conference in Kiev eight years ago. He has

frequently dropped in to chat during visits to Washington. Arbatov is toughminded, and his grasp of American politics probably is unequaled by most American professors of political science.

He sets forth a salient point: the need to change the direction of the superpower nuclear arms race. This is about all one can expect from an expert from the Soviet Union who cannot freely criticize his government as Cox is privileged to do. Nevertheless, Arbatov recognizes the suicidal pathway that the U.S., the Soviet Union and many others tread.

My purpose is quoting at length from the opening paragraph of the book is to point out that if every human being on earth could read but one page of a book on the question of survival, I would nominate this one. I seldom underline for future reference. This book is a gem.

Cox analyzes our warning system and the whole of nuclear strategy from the technological to the political, drawing upon statistical data and Congressional testimony. He backtracks each weapon system from the target to the launch decision and exposes unconscionable levels of overkill as well as the potential for accidental launching.

The reader is provided a thorough review of the geopolitics played by the superpowers. Cox shows convincingly that perceptions, as opposed to reality, dominated the decision-making process. He points to Soviet adventurism in Africa and the Middle East based on total miscalculations of the response of United States policy makers who chose to rekindle the arms race, revive the cold war and block the SALT process.

Former President Richard Nixon, through his detente policy, was moving the U.S. toward possible accommodation with the USSR, but the promise was badly crippled by watergate. Subsequent political bungling and exploitation of fears by former Sen. Frank Church of Idaho, Sen. Henry Jackson of Washington, President Carter and Vice President Mondale, ultimately resulted in the victory for the cold warriors. During the current Republican Reagan Administration, Cox ironically sees two Democrats as playing a major role in sustaining the Cold War syndrome — Sen. Jackson and Paul Nitze. The adventures of the Soviets in the Third World have reinforced the position of the hard liners, and the effective propaganda launched against the American public by the Committee on the Present Danger (a small group of intellectuals) and the American Security Council (the operating arm) has successfully torpedoed detente.

Perhaps the star chapter in this enlightened analysis deals with "Misestimating Soviet Power," a calmly stated thesis that destroys the myth perpetuated by the "hawks" that the Soviets are "ahead in the race" and approaching the point of successful nuclear blackmail. We have been treated to the same unfounded information in the past like "bomber gap," "missile gap," "throw weight gap" and now the "window of vulnerability." All have proven to be false alarms, usually pursued in public to get votes or appropriations.

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